United Nations A/HRC/40/21

General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 December 2018

Original: English

Human Rights Council
Fortieth session
25 February–22 March 2019
Agenda item 2
Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which complements the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture submitted to the General Assembly at its seventy-third session (A/73/281), provides information on the activities of the Fund and describes in particular the recommendations for grants adopted by the Board of Trustees at its forty-eighth session, held in Geneva from 1 to 5 October 2018.

GE.18-22016(E)
1822016

Please recycle

I. Introduction

A. Submission of the report

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/163 and complements the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (A/73/281). It contains updated information on the activities of the Fund, in particular the recommendations adopted by the Board of Trustees at its forty-eighth session, held in Geneva from 1 to 5 October 2018.

B. Mandate of the Fund

2. The Fund receives voluntary contributions from Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals. In accordance with the mandate of the Fund outlined in General Assembly resolution 36/151 and the practices established by the Board of Trustees since 1982, the Fund provides grants to established channels of assistance, in particular NGOs, associations of victims and of family members of victims, private and public hospitals, legal clinics and public interest law firms that submit project proposals aimed at the provision of medical, psychological, social, financial, legal, humanitarian or other forms of direct assistance to victims of torture and members of their families.

C. Administration of the Fund and composition of the Board of Trustees

3. The Secretary-General administers the Fund through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with the advice of a Board of Trustees composed of five members acting in their personal capacity and appointed by the Secretary-General with due regard to equitable geographical distribution and in consultation with their Governments. The Board of Trustees is currently composed of Sara Hossain (Bangladesh), Lawrence Murugu Mute (Kenya), Mikołaj Pietrzak (Chair, Poland) and Vivienne Nathanson (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), whose mandates end on 20 October 2020, and Gaby Oré Aguilar (Peru), whose mandate ends on 9 July 2020. Of note, the mandate of Ms. Hossain has been temporarily suspended until 31 March 2019 owing to her appointment to the Commission of Inquiry established by the Human Rights Council to investigate all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights in the context of large-scale civilian protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

II. Management of grants

A. Admissibility criteria

4. Project admissibility criteria are outlined in the guidelines of the Fund. The guidelines require a project proposal to be presented by an established channel of assistance, in particular non-governmental organizations, associations of victims and of family members of victims, private and public hospitals, legal clinics and public interest law firms. The beneficiaries must be victims of torture and/or their family members. Priority is given to projects providing direct assistance to torture victims, which may consist of medical or psychological assistance, help with social or financial reintegration as well as various forms of legal assistance for victims or members of their families, including support in seeking redress or applying for asylum. As a general rule, projects are awarded on a yearly basis for a maximum of 10 years, subject to a satisfactory evaluation of the project and availability of funds.

5. Subject to availability of funds, the Fund also supports projects seeking to organize training or capacity-building activities for health-care professionals or other service providers, with priority given to applicant organizations that have already received a grant from the Fund. Such projects may take the form of training, workshops, seminars and conferences, peer-to-peer training and staff exchanges that would result in an increased capacity to deliver professional care to victims. They are to be conducted primarily for the benefit of the professional staff of the applicant organization. Grant requests for projects involving investigation, research, studies, publications or other similar activities are not admissible.

6. Outside the regular grant cycle and subject to the availability of funds, the Fund also provides emergency assistance to projects submitted through the emergency intersessional procedure of the Fund, as outlined in the guidelines of the Fund. Emergency grants may be awarded in exceptional circumstances, such as a sudden increase in the number of victims of torture to be assisted owing to a humanitarian crisis, including armed conflict, war or natural disasters. Emergency grants may also be awarded when such crises result in a grave situation that makes it impossible for an organization to continue to provide assistance to beneficiaries (for example, destruction of premises or offices), for the purpose of enabling the organization to resume its activities.

B. Monitoring and evaluation of grants

7. As a rule, pre-screening visits to applicant organizations are undertaken before a grant is awarded to a new project proposal. Regular monitoring visits to ongoing projects for which the renewed support of the Fund is being sought are also conducted to assess the implementation and impact of the projects funded. An internal guide on conducting visits to projects that have been funded, or are to be funded, has been developed by the secretariat of the Fund to ensure coherence in the evaluation process. In 2018, a total of 53 projects were visited for technical evaluation by the secretariat of the Fund, OHCHR field presences and members of the Board.

III. Financial situation of the Fund

8. The Board, in close coordination with the secretariat of the Fund and the Donors and External Relations Section of OHCHR, seeks to secure a more satisfactory level of contributions from donors, which is needed to respond to the current realities of victims of torture and their family members worldwide. It is estimated that a yearly income of $12 million is necessary to respond adequately to the requests for assistance received by the Fund from rehabilitation centres and other civil society actors worldwide. Over the last three years, the Fund has managed to secure an average yearly income of between $8 and $9 million.

9. The table below shows the contributions and pledges received in 2018 (as of 10 December). At the forty-eighth session of the Board, at which grants were recommended for projects to be implemented in 2019, the Fund had a net total of $8,378,002 available for its activities, mainly for grants to support critical services to victims of torture and their family members, to be implemented in the course of 2019.

Contributions and pledges received from 1 January to 10 December 2018

Donor	*Amount (United States dollars)*	*Date of receipt*
Contributions		
Andorra	12 270	19 March 2018
Andorra	11 792	20 June 2018
Argentina	15 000	17 January 2018
Austria	23 310	19 October 2018
Canada	45 846	15 March 2018
Chile	5 000	28 June 2018
Denmark	784 042	1 July 2018
France	61 349	7 March 2018
Germany	349 650	24 September 2018
Germany	340 909	20 November 2018
Holy See	2 000	2 February 2018
India	24 982	12 March 2018
Italy	5 787	30 July 2018
Kuwait	10 000	25 January 2018
Liechtenstein	25 380	19 June 2018
Luxembourg	17 482	21 September 2018
Mexico	10 000	29 June 2018
Netherlands	113 636	26 November 2018
Norway	352 913	15 November 2018
Pakistan	2 982	3 July 2018
Portugal	23 895	2 January 2018
Qatar	28 347	29 October 2018
Saudi Arabia	70 000	27 April 2018
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	34 722	29 March 2018
United States of America	6 550 000	19 October 2018
Total contributions	**8 921 294**	
Pledges		
Czechia	8 764	Pledge
Germany	174 331	Pledge
Ireland	91 300	Pledge
Switzerland	200 803	Pledge
Total pledges	**475 198**	
Total contributions and pledges	**9 396 492**	

IV. Forty-eighth session of the Board of Trustees

10. The forty-eighth session of the Board of Trustees was held in Geneva from 1 to 5 October 2018. The Board examined proposals for funding and made recommendations on grants to be awarded to beneficiary organizations for activities to be implemented in the period from 1 January to 31 December 2019.

11. The amount available for distribution to projects was calculated after deducting programme support costs, the operating cash reserve and expected expenditures for non-grant activities.

12. At the forty-eighth session, the Board reviewed a total of 213 admissible project proposals received under the call for applications for 2019, aimed at providing direct assistance to victims of torture and their families, as well as — to a lesser extent — training and capacity-building in the field of rehabilitation. Applications amounted to a total of $13,441,350.

13. In line with the grant-making procedure set out at its forty-fifth session (A/72/278, paras. 5–8), the Board recommended that $7,231,000 be promptly awarded for a total of 160 projects, to be implemented in 2019 in 77 countries for an average grant size of $45,200. Of those projects, 155 are for the delivery of direct assistance services to victims of torture and 5 are for strengthening the capacity of the beneficiary organizations to deliver such services (i.e. training and capacity-building projects). With the vital financial assistance of the Fund, it is expected that nearly 50,000 victims and their families worldwide will have access to rehabilitation and other forms of concrete assistance in the course of 2019.

14. Admissible project proposals were reviewed by the Board on a competitive basis, taking into account the merits and documented needs of each proposal and its complementarity with other initiatives, as well as the number of years of continuous support by the Fund to the same project.

15. The Board also recommended setting aside an additional $309,000 to respond to emergency assistance requests that may be received in the course of 2019 through the intersessional procedure of the Fund. The Board also agreed that the additional income to be received by the Fund before 31 December 2018 would be added to the emergency budget line.

16. The Board noted with satisfaction that through its enhanced emergency procedure, in 2018 the Fund was able to provide financial support in the amount of $450,375 for the immediate and urgent relief of victims of torture. Grants under the emergency procedure were awarded to support vital rehabilitation services through a special call, to Rohingya victims forced to flee from Myanmar to Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh.

17. During its forty-eighth session, the Board met with the newly appointed High Commissioner for Human Rights to discuss her involvement in the forthcoming activities and events supported by the Fund, as well as strategies to raise the visibility of the Fund and the role it plays in support of victims and civil society actors.

18. The Board also met with the secretaries of the Committee against Torture and the Subcommittee for Prevention of Torture to coordinate the work of the United Nations in combating the use of torture. It also held an exchange of views with the core group of the Convention against Torture Initiative to explore ways of promoting greater implementation of article 14 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment on the right to rehabilitation and redress. The Board also discussed with the Victims' Rights Advocate concrete ways to advance the victim-centred agenda of the United Nations.

19. The Permanent Mission of Denmark convened a working-level meeting during the session to finalize the establishment and launch of a Group of friends of the Fund, a State-driven initiative to lend support to the Fund and the cause it stands for.

20. In line with its objective to make the Fund a platform for knowledge-sharing in the field of rehabilitation and redress for victims, the Board also agreed to organize an expert

workshop on the theme of "Torture in the context of sexual and gender-based violence" at its forty-ninth session in April 2019. As on previous occasions, the workshop will gather selected experts and practitioners from organizations supported by the Fund, as well as representatives from treaty bodies, special procedures and United Nations agencies. The workshop will be followed by a public panel, to be held on 4 April 2019. The findings of the previous expert workshop on the subject of "Seeking justice for torture: a victim-centred approach" are contained in document A/73/281 (paras. 5–9).

V. Making a contribution

21. Governments, non-governmental organizations and other public and private entities are encouraged to contribute to the Fund. It is important to note that only specifically earmarked contributions are attributed to the Fund. For more information on how to contribute and details about the Fund, donors are requested to contact the secretariat of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland; e-mail: unvfvt@ohchr.org; telephone: +41 22 917 9376; fax: +41 22 917 9017.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

22. **Torture is today being practised in increasingly complex contexts and crises, resulting in a broad range of victims, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, women, children, human rights defenders, political opponents, youth, victims of sexual and gender-based violence, victims of enforced disappearances, persons with disabilities, minorities and indigenous peoples and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. The need for redress and rehabilitation is very pressing.**

23. **In his statement issued on the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on 26 June 2018, the Secretary-General recalled that victims of torture have a right to an effective remedy, rehabilitation and redress. While States often neglect their obligation to prevent torture and fail to provide victims with effective and prompt redress, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture continues to play an indispensable role by supporting organizations that provide specialized and unique assistance to victims of torture.**

24. **The Fund has also affirmed itself, with expert guidance from its Board, as a platform for exchanging and collecting expertise in the field of rehabilitation and redress for victims of torture by holding annual workshops. The next such workshop, focusing on the theme of "Torture in the context of sexual and gender-based violence", will be held in Geneva in April 2019.**

25. **The Secretary-General appeals to Member States and other stakeholders to contribute to the Fund, noting that contributions are a concrete manifestation of the commitment of States to the elimination of torture, in line with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, in particular its article 14. There is a clear need to increase support to the Fund beyond the present annual income of around $9 million. The Fund requires a minimum of $12 million on a yearly basis to respond adequately to the increasing demands for assistance to victims of torture.**